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SUBJECT: ECUADORIAN AMAZON LEANS TOWARD CORREA; RESENTS CENTRAL  
GOVERNMENT ABANDONMENT

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Amazon provinces of Orellana and Napo have largely indigenous populations and represent just over 1 percent of the national electorate - yet contribute approximately 60% of the national budget in the form of oil production. During a recent visit by Emboffs, officials in both provinces expressed perceptions of neglect by the central government giving rise to disruptive and sometimes violent strikes to demand much needed resources. Resources were needed to improve poor educational and health systems, develop potable water projects, create employment opportunities and build roads. Officials described the current political climate as one marked by high levels of apathy, with people more focused on the election of provincial representatives than on electing Ecuador's president. Preparations for the upcoming elections were proceeding well. Officials confided that leftist presidential candidate, Rafael Correa, one of the few candidates to visit the area, had attracted crowds in the thousands and impressed many with his populist message and by speaking in Kichwa to the largely indigenous communities. End Summary.

#### Background

¶2. (SBU) During a visit to the provinces of Orellana and Napo in northeastern Ecuador, from September 18-20, PolOff and AidOff met with local government and provincial electoral officials and civil society members to discuss local perceptions in the lead-up to elections scheduled for October 15 and other issues of concern.

¶3. (SBU) Orellana, located in the northeastern portion of Ecuador, is Ecuador's newest province (it was once part of Napo), and the city of Francisco de Orellana (also known as El Coca) is the provincial capital. The province has only existed since 1999 and is rich in oil and timber reserves. It also boasts beautiful tropical scenery and a wealth of flora and fauna. Orellana has a population of close to 80,000, and counts 54,595 registered voters. They have a high concentration of indigenous inhabitants; principally the Kichwa, Huaorani, and Schuar communities. PolOff noted that most of the local government officials were of mestizo background and most had migrated from other areas of Ecuador; all were very sensitive to the needs of the indigenous communities, however. The prefect (U.S. governor-equivalent), and mayor both belong to the same political party (DP-UDC/PSC/MUPP-NP); officials claimed strong coordination and collaboration as a result.

¶4. (SBU) The province of Napo is located west of Orellana province, with Tena as its capital, and contains large sections of the Amazon rainforest. Approximately 60% of the population is indigenous, primarily Kichwa. Most of its 52,401 registered voters are located in Tena. The prefect and mayor there belong to different political parties; local government officials noted a lack of coordination and collaboration as a result.

#### Provincial Background

¶5. (SBU) In El Coca, government officials discussed the province's

recent experiences organizing disruptive transportation strikes to demand the central government's attention and seek additional resources. Officials complained that oil revenue only benefited the central government, yet the province had to deal with oil production ills such as contaminated waterways and land, and blamed such contamination for a high incidence of cancer. Officials said resources were needed to improve the educational and health systems, potable water projects, construction of better access roads, attract investment, and create employment opportunities. They stressed they are focusing their efforts on post-oil, long-term plans and looking at ways to develop the tourism industry and agricultural projects as a means of diversification and employment creation. They added the Ambassador of Korea had recently visited and offered development funds; trucks and better roads were needed to transport production to markets.

¶16. (SBU) In Tena, government officials said the local population still resented the removal from power of native son and ex-president, Lucio Gutierrez, contributing to high levels of apathy and polarization. As president, Gutierrez raised voter expectations which were never fulfilled. Provincial officials were proud of their confrontations with the central government over issues such as control over local rivers, water resources, poor roads, low quality of education, high levels of illiteracy and insufficient medical facilities.

#### Electoral History

¶17. (SBU) In Orellana province, ex-president Lucio Gutierrez (PSP/MUPP-NP) received 73.77 percent of the vote in the second round of the 2002 presidential elections, with Alvaro Noboa (PRIAN) winning just 26.23 percent. In 2004, Prefect Guadalupe Llori Abarca (DP-UDC/PSC/MUPP-NP) won the election with 35.95 percent of the vote, while El Coca mayor, Anita Rivas Parraga (DP-UDC/PSC/MUPP-NP)

secured 35.43 percent of the vote.

¶18. (SBU) In Napo province, ex-president Lucio Gutierrez (PSP/MUPP-NP) received 91.31 percent of the vote in the second round of the 2002 presidential elections, with Alvaro Noboa (PRIAN) winning just 8.69 percent. In 2004, Prefect Gina Sanmiguel Palacios (PSC) won the election with 39.86 of the vote, while Tena mayor, Washington Varela Salazar (PSP) secured 28.83 percent of the vote, winning by a slim margin.

#### Civil Society Participation

¶19. (SBU) PolOff and AIDOff met with representatives of Citizen Participation (PC) in El Coca and Tena. PC is an NGO assisting in election observation including: performing quick counts, providing candidate information, organizing public meetings with candidates with participation of citizens and media, and developing civic education campaigns to promote responsible voting and accountability. Anita Gavilanes, a PC volunteer in El Coca, described the difficulty she encountered in raising civic pride and getting people to volunteer their time. In the past candidates would offer parties, music, food, drink and cash gifts to gain voter support. However, she hadn't seen such activity during this election period. Gavilanes catalogued a litany of problems that create a high level of apathy among her province's population--especially its youth. The lack of basic hospital services, poor schools and non-existent universities caused many young people to move elsewhere seeking jobs, and many young students moved to Cuba in search of free higher education.

¶10. (SBU) David Granja, the PC representative in Tena, said leftist presidential candidate Rafael Correa had recently visited Tena and been enthusiastically received by crowds he estimated at 8,000. He was particularly impressed that youth groups had organized and coordinated bus services to transport people from the outlying areas into town. He said Correa's populist message resonated with the crowds, particularly his theme that a percentage of oil revenues should be designated towards the building of roads. Correa's use of Kichwa, also made a positive impression. Granja said Correa had used the same populist themes Gutierrez had, and was well received despite Correa's support for Gutierrez' ouster. Luis Macas, in contrast, the Pachakutik presidential candidate, had

canceled a subsequent trip to Tena fearing he would not attract the same numbers as Correa, according to Granja. Granja said that political participation by women during this electoral season had increased including non-indigenous women candidates running under the indigenous Pachakutik political movement. Granja expressed deep concern over continued oil spills and the deviation of and commissioning of rivers to mining companies. He said the affected indigenous communities were organizing; he feared future violent confrontations.

#### Electoral Preparation Moving Forward

¶11. (SBU) PolOff and AidOff met with electoral officials in both cities. Representatives in both provinces said that election preparation was moving ahead relatively well, given the region's financial limitations. El Coca officials told us that voting booth training was underway and that voting booths were in the process of being set up in indigenous communities. They were not well informed about the use of ballots for the blind, however. In Tena, Electoral Tribunal President Edgar Santillan thought the Braille ballots would only be made available in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca. He did not foresee major election irregularities and was encouraged by the participation of national election observers such as Citizen Participation and Q'uellkaj, an indigenous organization (both supported by USAID).

#### Comment

¶12. (SBU) Although government officials and civil society representatives stressed that high levels of apathy, particularly in the young, permeate both provinces, Correa's visit to the area had apparently awakened dormant voter interest. Correa's populist message for change, targeting corruption and picking up on the unfulfilled promises of ex-president Gutierrez, apparently resonated with the local population. Government officials in both provinces expressed concern about Correa's ability to deliver once in office. One official stated that Correa's message came "from his heart, not his head." Many confided they were worried over a Correa presidency and wondered how long he would be able to remain in power, if elected.

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